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New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Filippi Balestra (San Marino), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 8

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

Letter from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences (A/53/298/Add.1)

The Acting President: I should like first to draw the attention of representatives to document A/53/298/Add.1, which contains a letter dated 1 October 1998 addressed to the President of the General Assembly by the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences. As members are aware, the Assembly, in paragraph 7 of its resolution 40/243, decided that no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly should be permitted to meet at United Nations Headquarters during a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

As indicated in the letter I have just mentioned, the Committee on Conferences has recommended that the General Assembly authorize the Committee on Information to meet in New York during the main part of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly.

May I take it that the General Assembly adopts the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 164 (*continued*)

Causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/871)

Mr. Mohammed (Ethiopia): Permit me at the outset to thank the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for his report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. The report provides a comprehensive and objective analysis of the sources of conflict in Africa, ranging from historical legacies to economic challenges and factors attributable to specific conflict situations. Most important, it examines, at length and with the requisite clarity, the various ways and means at the disposal of the international community and Africa to address conflicts in the continent, and it draws important conclusions and recommendations that require further follow-up and implementation. In this respect, my delegation commends the follow-up actions taken thus far by the Secretary-General and by the Security Council, in particular the holding of the ministerial meeting of the Council on 24 September 1998.

We are also grateful to the President of the General Assembly for giving this matter the attention and the priority it deserves in the deliberations of the Assembly at its current session.

98-86053 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

Africa is indeed a vast and varied continent, and the sources of conflict and the challenges it faces reflect in many ways its diversity. But, as the Secretary-General rightly points out in his report, the sources of the challenges and conflicts in Africa are closely interrelated or are linked by a number of common themes and experiences. Inasmuch as the causes of conflict in Africa and the challenges that African countries face are complex and diverse, their solution clearly demands the determined effort of Africa and genuine partnership on the part of the international community.

The past few years have been viewed by many as the beginning of a new era of hope and of African renaissance. Notwithstanding the failures and tragedies, especially in Somalia and Rwanda, the present decade has undoubtedly witnessed important transformations in Africa. Many African countries, including my own, have undertaken far-reaching political and economic reform measures aimed at promoting political pluralism and establishing an environment conducive to a market-oriented economy. Regional cooperation and integration have also gained new dimensions and momentum in Africa, leading to the establishment of the African Economic Community and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. The role and contribution of subregional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), both in the field of economic integration and in conflict prevention and resolution have also become an important factor for stability and progress in Africa in recent years.

In spite of these laudable accomplishments and our expectations and hopes for the best, developments of the past few months, namely the emergence of new conflicts and the resurgence of old ones in various parts of Africa, have become a serious source of concern and preoccupation. This makes the debate on the report of the Secretary-General and the focus on Africa all the more timely and challenging.

In addressing the sources of conflict in Africa, the Secretary-General rightly refers to historical legacies as one of the factors of conflict in Africa, especially in the context of boundary or territorial disputes. The significance of these legacies and the need for permanent solutions was acknowledged from the very outset by the founding fathers of our regional organization, the OAU, who in their great wisdom and vision declared in 1963 that African countries would accept boundaries inherited at the time of their accession to independence. As rightly pointed out by the Secretary-General, that wisdom and vision of African leaders has proved over the past three and half decades to be indispensable in preventing and resolving conflicts arising from territorial claims in Africa.

More often than not, in situations of border disputes, violations of this sacrosanct principle, accompanied by the use of force, remain the primary source of territorial conflicts in Africa. Needless to say, even in the absence of that principle, it is very clear that international law prohibits the use of force, except in self-defence, as a means of resolving disputes or changing circumstances on the ground.

This explains the cause of the present unfortunate and dangerous situation in the Horn of Africa, and the irresponsible and belligerent behaviour of Eritrea towards its neighbours and its recent aggression against Ethiopia. The present conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea is not just a simple or ordinary bilateral dispute between the two countries. Rather it is the result of aggression committed by Eritrea, which constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and the principles enshrined in the charters of the United Nations and of the OAU.

The Government of Ethiopia, guided by its unwavering commitment to the peace and development not only of its own people but also of its subregion, has exercised maximum self-restraint in the face of the Eritrean aggression. It has accepted and fully cooperated with the various peace efforts, initiatives and decisions, in particular those of the United States and Rwandan facilitators and the decisions of the OAU and of the Security Council. Eritrea, however, remains defiant in its rejection of these important initiatives and decisions.

It goes without saying that primary responsibility for resolving conflicts in Africa and elsewhere rests in the hands of the parties directly involved. The international community, in particular the United Nations system, and relevant regional and subregional organizations also have a pivotal role not only in facilitating or complementing the efforts of the parties concerned, but also in ensuring respect for the norms and principles of international law, especially when these are so flagrantly violated. Inaction on the part of the international community and appeasement in the face of such violations will only encourage intransigence and set a dangerous precedent with far-reaching consequences for peace and stability. It should be made clear that lasting peace cannot be

achieved at the expense of, or by compromising, principles and norms of international law, or by appeasement of those who engage in irresponsible action.

The Secretary-General highlights in his report various means and methods of responding to conflict situations, and makes important recommendations, some of which have been followed through by the Secretary-General and by the Security Council. In particular, we welcome the measures aimed at enhancing African capacity and preparedness for peacekeeping, as well as the efforts being made to address questions relating to illicit arms transfers and to the implementation of arms embargoes imposed by the Security Council.

One of the important issues raised in the report is the role of external factors in peace efforts and the need for coordination of their actions. In fulfilling the mandate entrusted to it by the OAU and IGAD, Ethiopia has made and continues to make efforts to assist in the resolution of the crisis in Somalia.

Our experience in this regard has clearly shown that parallel initiatives and the lack of coordination among external actors have created obstacles to making an effective impact on the peace process. Therefore, with recognition of the need for coordination of all external forces for durable peace in Somalia, encouraging efforts are now being made to establish a mechanism for harmonizing the policies and actions of external actors. We are confident that the international community, and the United Nations in particular, will provide their support for this endeavour, and we remain actively engaged in the search for peace in Somalia.

Cooperation and coordination of activities between the United Nations and the OAU are essential for the success of efforts to deal with conflict situations in Africa. My delegation wishes in this connection to acknowledge the important measures taken by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to enhance and strengthen the cooperation and coordination between the two organizations.

The tragic victims of violent conflicts in Africa, as in other parts of the world, are often innocent civilians, including children, which makes the humanitarian dimension of conflicts an issue of grave concern to the international community. In most conflict situations in the continent international action has been largely initiated in response to appalling humanitarian tragedies. In all circumstances, however, it should be stressed clearly that respect for the rules and norms of international humanitarian law by all parties to a conflict is not an option, but an imperative. Humanitarian responses and actions need to be undertaken in a coordinated and timely manner and with strict adherence to the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and universality. It is of absolute importance that all the sectors involved in humanitarian activities, including the United Nations system, respect these principles and avoid roles contrary to their mandates, which must remain strictly humanitarian at all times and in all places.

As pointed out in the Secretary-General's report, development is a human right and remains the principal long-term objective of all countries in Africa. Sustainable development is also central to the prospect of conflict prevention and durable peace in Africa. It is clearly evident that to succeed in building frameworks for enduring peace and stability on the African continent, the international community must form genuine partnerships with the African countries to strengthen the continent's social and economic foundations.

In short, while the international community should continue to focus on achieving peace, security and stability, which are so pivotal, it should not ignore the magnitude of the socio-economic challenges confronting the continent, which are real and are at the centre of the issue of peace in the continent.

African countries are cognizant of this stark reality and have undertaken far-reaching economic reforms aimed at revitalizing and transforming their economies. It was hoped that these actions would make Africa an attractive destination for capital and foreign direct investment. Regrettably, these much desired outcomes have largely not materialized. First, the level of external assistance is declining and export earnings are shrinking as commodity prices plummet. Secondly, due to declining domestic resources to finance the necessary social overhead capital, Africa is not able to tap the benefits of the growing global economy.

Africa therefore strongly advocates reforms and calls for globalization that is responsive and sensitive to the situation of the world's weakest economies. This has to be accomplished through increased and carefully targeted official development assistance flows, by opening up markets for commodities of export interest to Africa, by converting official bilateral debts owed by the poorest African countries into grants and by improving the access of people living in poverty to productive opportunity. In this regard, Ethiopia fully endorses the

recommendations of the Secretary-General made at the informal meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Development Assistance Committee countries and reiterated during the ministerial meeting of the Security Council on 24 September 1998. These recommendations rightly highlight priority areas in meeting Africa's economic challenges. We believe that implementation of these recommendations greatly helps mitigate the negative impacts of globalization in Africa. It could also help the efforts of African countries to promote economic growth and development in the continent.

In concluding, let me express the conviction of my delegation that with sufficient political will and determination on the part of all of us — both in Africa and in the international community at large — we will be able to lay a solid foundation for peace and development in Africa as we enter the new millennium.

Mr. Pohan (Indonesia): The delegation of Indonesia considers it both timely and appropriate for the General Assembly to undertake a review and reappraisal of our collective and concerted endeavours to restore peace and stability and enhance prospects for development in the African continent. Our deliberations reflect the continuing concern of the international community over these issues facing Africa and its collective determination to forge a partnership between the continent and the rest of the world to resolve them.

We are grateful to the Secretary-General for his report of 13 April 1998 on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, which contains balanced suggestions between economic and security issues, on the one hand, and internal and international aspects, on the other, and whose implementation would bolster peace and security in the continent. We also support the five priority areas he outlined at the outset of our debate. In our view, the steps to be taken by the Secretariat and United Nations organs on follow-up activities based on these specific proposals contain realistic and achievable goals in mitigating the numerous problems confronting the African countries.

Indonesia reiterates its support for the efforts being made to reach the goals envisioned by the people of Africa, in concert with the position taken by the Non-Aligned Movement in its Final Document adopted in Durban, South Africa. The Movement, while recognizing the recent positive developments in Africa in the socio-economic fields, injected a fresh, new momentum into our continuing endeavours to collectively address the various interlinked issues through a comprehensive and integrated approach.

On the basis of the experience of many Member States, including Indonesia, a recognition of the interrelated nature of peace, security and development against the backdrop of a world that is entering a qualitatively new horizon should lead to the peaceful resolution of disputes which will mitigate the negative impact of globalization that threatens to marginalize the developing countries and further reduce the minimal advantages they enjoy.

As Africa stands poised at the threshold of the next millennium and looks towards the attainment of its goals of stable peace and secure economic prosperity, its abundant natural resources and the innate genius of its people will be a force to be reckoned with in the global economy. However, such a prospect calls for an environment of peace and security, without which development would be impeded. Hence, my delegation views with apprehension the persistence of conflicts in various parts of Africa, resulting in an unconscionable toll in human lives and material devastation. In this regard, we welcome the involvement of the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and subregional organizations, and we commend their tireless efforts to resolve disputes peacefully and amicably through dialogue and negotiations, as conflicts in Africa are not amenable to military solutions. There is much that these organizations can achieve through working in concert to remove obstacles that endanger security, and thereby facilitate the peace process. Ultimately, however, it is up to the leaders of Africa to set aside their differences in the larger interests of their peoples and countries. The need of the hour demands no less.

It is pertinent to note that in its presidential statement of 16 September 1998, the Security Council affirmed its intention to take steps consistent with its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and called for the strengthening of Africa's capacity to participate in all aspects of peacekeeping and for increased bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the field of peacekeeping. Resolution 1197 (1998), adopted by the Council last month, focuses our attention on the need to undertake a series of measures that would contribute to conflict prevention and resolution. Taken together, they would augment Africa's capabilities with regard to both peacekeeping and dealing with conflict situations and thereby contribute to the stability of the continent.

It is also self-evident that in the arduous task of building the essential infrastructure for peace and stability in the African continent, the international community must work together with the African countries in strengthening the continent's economic and social foundations. Poverty and pestilence, illiteracy and hunger breed despair and resentment. Only through sustained economic and social development will people gain a vested interest in working towards peaceful solutions of their differences.

It no longer suffices for the international community to convene and merely engage in perfunctory expressions of empathy and support for the African countries without extending concrete assistance. If indeed there is a genuine desire to prevent humanitarian disaster or to avoid costly peacekeeping operations and peacemaking efforts, then comprehensive, concerted and concrete action on economic development cooperation must be taken. Anything less will cast aspersions on the credibility of the international community's commitment to the cause of Africa. Let me emphasize our full support for the Assembly's endeavours in exercising its jurisdiction and in fulfilling its responsibilities to Africa.

Indonesia's commitment to the people of Africa has in the past been demonstrated by, among other things, its support of African development during its chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement, its participation in such forums as the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s; support for the United Nations Special Initiative on Africa; and bilateral cooperation with a number of African countries.

Finally, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that Indonesia convened a High-level Advisory Meeting on the South Summit in Jakarta last August and will convene the forthcoming High-level Meeting on Regional/Subregional Cooperation in Bali from 2 to 4 December of this year, which will pave the way for the next South summit meeting in Cuba prior to the Millennium Assembly in the year 2000 to further intensify South-South cooperation. It is our hope that these processes will help meet the challenges of globalization facing the South, and Africa in particular, and thereby facilitate the integration of the developing countries into the mainstream of the global economy.

Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon) (*interpretation from French*): As the Security Council has done, the General Assembly is today considering the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa.

This discussion is important for two reasons. First, it concerns peace and development in Africa and therefore the future of that continent. Given the major challenges posed at the end of this century by economic globalization and technological changes, which themselves give rise to serious concerns about the future of humankind, the African peoples, more than others, are feeling vulnerable. They are turning, full of hope, to our Organization, which has worked so hard for their freedom.

They are expecting these discussions to shed the necessary light to enable us to discern the signs of the times, interpret the complex realities of human existence and provide more humane conditions of life. They are expecting also recommendations conducive to concrete and sustained action.

These deliberations are likewise important because, since they coincide with a twofold fiftieth anniversary — that of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of peacekeeping operations — they bring us to the very raison d'être of the United Nations. Indeed, the peoples of the United Nations created it, *inter alia*, to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

The United Nations thus has a mission to promote peace and development, but these efforts are not close to fruition in today's Africa. But with the will and resolve of the African peoples, these goals will be achieved tomorrow with — we hope — the sustained support of the international community. That is what is at stake in these deliberations.

At this stage, allow me to reiterate our most heartfelt congratulations to the Secretary-General on the report, whose clear-sighted analyses and bold conclusions we support. To its credit, the report calls upon us to consider the issue of security from a holistic perspective. Security and therefore peace can be guaranteed in a durable way only if we fight together to reduce poverty and to promote development and democracy.

The report, truly a plea for development and peace in Africa, makes a timely contribution to promoting the confidence of the African masses in our Organization. Through the deliberations it prompted in the Security Council, ordinary men and women throughout Africa were able to hear, in the voice of their United Nations, an echo of their own daily reality.

The report of the Secretary-General is, in our opinion, a plea for peace in Africa. This peace can be assured only by the peaceful settlement and prevention of conflicts. We can no longer, we must no longer, prepare for war in order to have peace; rather, we need to support peace in order to prevent war. These two concepts constitute the essence of my statement.

As this century comes to a close, Africa is the arena of many conflicts. Within some States, ethnic and political differences and conflicts of interest — because they have been improperly dealt with or poorly managed — are degenerating into confrontation and civil war. Likewise, neighbouring, brotherly countries are divided or torn apart by border disputes born, in most instances, of lack of respect for the sacrosanct principle of the inviolability of the borders inherited from the colonial era.

As regards the consequences, considerable resources have been mobilized to conduct fratricidal wars while hunger racks populations, and there is a distressing procession of refugees, displaced persons and entire populations that are prey to epidemics, massacres and slaughter.

Africa needs peace. Already facing so many scourges, it cannot continue to enjoy the luxury of useless and expensive wars among its peoples. If it is to have peace, tolerance and respect must once again become African virtues. Law, dialogue, working together and seeking consensus in order to reconcile apparently opposing interests preserve peace better than taking up arms.

Such dialogue must be the rule in relations among African States, all of which, in accordance with the Charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and that of the United Nations, are committed to resolving their differences by peaceful means, including by having recourse to the International Court of Justice.

Africa expects the international community to support the strengthening of the capacities to intervene and act of the conflict-settlement mechanisms that have been established by the Africans themselves. It also expects the international community to provide constructive, positive support to the democratization process taking place as part of the establishment of States based on the rule of law in order to ensure peace and stability.

Such assistance must be provided impartially, without systematic support for certain political factions. It should help promote and consolidate national concord. In order to maintain peace in Africa we also need to commit ourselves resolutely to conflict prevention. This brings me to the second point of my speech.

According to the Charter, the mission of the United Nations is

> "to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace".

Conflict prevention is thus one of the primary responsibilities of the Organization. And yet we do not always sufficiently stress preventive action. In fact, more of the resources of the Organization are used for purely therapeutic measures such as the deployment of peacekeeping operations — which are often deployed too late.

Therefore, we think it useful to stress some activities that could help prevent conflicts or, at the very least, prevent those conflicts from degenerating into violence or armed struggle. Peacekeeping forces made available to States after or during a conflict, seek to prevent a resumption of violence. Cameroon believes that the United Nations, and in particular the Security Council, could decide to systematically deploy forces preventively in situations where there was a clear danger of an armed conflict breaking out at any moment. This would be particularly relevant to border disputes. Given the success of the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, it should not remain the lone example of this approach. Likewise, when confronted with these conflict situations the Secretary-General should be encouraged to have greater recourse to the appointment of personal representatives.

In the context of the struggle for peace in Africa, special attention should be paid to the illicit trafficking in small arms and their circulation among civilians. This is a matter of concern to us. Ninety per cent of those wounded or killed by these weapons are civilians — 80 per cent of them women or children. It is therefore urgent to seek a global consensus on the oversight and control of illicit arms transfers. Cameroon welcomes the convening, in the near future we hope, of a United Nations conference to consider all aspects of the illicit arms trade. The Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa would appreciate United Nations assistance so that we could develop effective measures for stemming the flow of small arms in our subregion.

The prevention of conflicts necessarily depends on the development of a culture of peace. We appreciate the aid received from the United Nations, through the Standing Advisory Committee, to support our efforts to consolidate peace and security in the subregion.

We are confident that we can continue to benefit from this assistance and that of friendly countries for the pursuance of our programmes to develop the men and women of our subregion into makers of peace. This is an urgent and importance task. The preamble to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Constitution reminds us that

> "since wars begin in the minds of men, and it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed".

The effort to prevent conflicts cannot be confined to political causes; it must also deal with economic causes.

As the Security Council, meeting at the level of heads of State or Government on 31 January 1992, acknowledged,

> "The absence of war and military conflicts amongst States does not in itself ensure international peace and security. The non-military sources of instability in the economic...[field] have become threats to peace and security." (*S/23500, presidential statement, eleventh paragraph*)

Poverty is therefore a threat to peace and stability. This is all the more true in Africa, where, because of the crushing debt burden, the constraints of structural adjustment and the dwindling aid received, African States are no longer able to finance adequately the minimum social services that are necessary for the well-being of their peoples.

Hence, how can we prevent conflicts in Africa if we do not attack the economic and social problems that have an impact on peace and security with the same energy as we tackle political problems?

The holistic view of security, which was so eloquently described by the Secretary-General in his report, calls for the Security Council, to which the Charter confers "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security", to use all of the Charter's potential to attack poverty in Africa. Why not use the machinery described in its Article 65, whereby the Economic and Social Council can provide the Security Council with information and assist it if the latter so requests?

What Africa needs to ensure its sustainable development is, in the first place, an equitable solution to the debt burden problem, which is strangling the economies of our countries to the point where financial transfers have become negative for many of them. Here we welcome the announcement by the Secretary-General of the holding this week of a high-level round table on African debt. It also needs a balanced partnership with the industrialized countries that would allow Africa to get the aid and investments it needs. Finally, it needs a review of the working methods and functioning of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank so that these two important instruments will serve Africa and its sustainable development.

That is why Cameroon welcomes the proposal of the Secretary-General to target efforts towards resolving the economic problems of Africa in the five following priority areas: increasing and improving official development assistance; converting into grants all remaining official bilateral debt; expanding access to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt (HIPC) Initiative; making more flexible the conditions for access to markets for African exports; and finally, increasing investments. If the international community were to keep its promises in these five areas, there would be real progress towards the creation of conditions for sustainable development and durable peace in Africa.

Cameroon made the following point last April in the Security Council: the absence of development may constitute a threat to international prosperity, peace and security. As communications develop, distances between various parts of the planet are getting much smaller.

The twenty-first century cannot tolerate islands of prosperity and opulence in an ocean of suffering and destitution. Africa's economic backwardness, therefore, is still a major challenge to us all; we can and must meet this challenge. Global equilibrium and the very survival of humankind depend on it.

The international community has mobilized in the past to rebuild and develop some parts of the world. Africa expects the international community to assist it in its renaissance at the dawn of the third millennium. When Africa awakes, it will remember.

Mr. Mapuranga (Zimbabwe): My delegation fully associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Namibia on behalf of the Southern African States, as well as that delivered by the representative of Burkina Faso on behalf of the member States of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). I shall therefore endeavour to refrain from making a contribution repetitive of issues already raised in those two statements.

My delegation is pleased to recall that the Secretary-General's report entitled "The causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa" was the subject of a formal meeting of the Security Council. We are encouraged to note that the Security Council, for its part, has taken significant steps, such as setting up working groups and adopting important resolutions on the Secretary-General's recommendations.

In this regard, we most heartily welcome this meeting, which has afforded the Assembly the opportunity to focus on aspects of the report which lie within the purview of the General Assembly's authority.

As we explore ways and means of achieving peace, security and stability, we cannot ignore the magnitude of the socio-economic problems confronting the African continent, which are ever so real and lie at the very core of the issue of peace and stability in Africa, the most economically backward region of the world. Very often, there is a tendency to dwell on the symptoms, while avoiding a confrontation with the root causes of instability in Africa.

In his report, the Secretary-General emphasizes that any and all efforts at securing peace have to be combined with steps towards ending Africa's poverty. Specifically, he called for the promotion of investment for economic growth, ensuring adequate levels of international aid, reducing the excruciating debt burden and opening international markets to Africa's products. This is an appeal which has the full support of my delegation, because it addresses some of the root causes of conflict in my continent.

My delegation strongly supports the priorities highlighted by the Secretary-General on 24 September 1998 at the informal meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistant Committee. Those priority needs are to increase the volume and improve the quality of official development assistance; to consider converting all remaining official bilateral debt owed by poor countries into grants; to liberalize access to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative; to ease access conditions for African exports; and to encourage investment in Africa, which has largely been marginalized in the process of globalization. I wish at this point to acknowledge and congratulate those Governments and development partners which have taken the lead in responding to these priority needs by converting bilateral debt owed by the poorest African countries into grants and increasing their development budgets in general.

Most of our countries in Africa have come a long way and made significant and very demanding strides to create an enabling environment for investment and economic growth. I wish to assure the international community that Africa will not be found wanting in this global effort to promote durable peace and sustainable development on the continent. We have long realized that Africa's problems require African leadership to find the solutions, but there is much that countries with greater resources can do in solidarity to make those solutions work.

In this connection, the United Nations should endeavour to extend, in concrete terms, assistance to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. Similarly, it is imperative to support such subregional security arrangements as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), which accomplished a splendid mission by restoring a democratically elected Government in Sierra Leone, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, whose member States are currently involved in operations to uphold the authority of the Government in the Kingdom of Lesotho and to defend the Democratic Republic of the Congo from invasion by two of its neighbours.

With regard to the role of the United Nations system, my delegation welcomes the commitment made by the Secretary-General that the Senior Management Group and the important sectors represented by those senior managers should vigorously work on follow-up activities to the report. We are most pleased that the Secretary-General has asked the Deputy Secretary-General to monitor the implementation of those follow-up activities. We also wish to encourage the pace-setting contacts and exchanges between the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity.

I wish to conclude by reiterating the Secretary-General's findings that peace and prosperity must be sought as one, with equal zeal and priority, and that political stability needs to be buttressed by economic development. Let us realize the goal of promoting durable peace and sustainable development in Africa.

Mr. Dangue Réwaka (Gabon) (*interpretation from French*): It is well known that the Security Council, of which Gabon is currently a member, has held two formal meetings on the Secretary-General's report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa to consider the recommendations that fall within its purview as the principal organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Following the first of these two meetings, held on 24 April 1998, the Security Council adopted resolution 1170 (1998), whereby it decided, *inter alia*, to establish an ad hoc Working Group mandated

> "to review all recommendations in the report related to the maintenance of international peace and security, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, and in that context, to prepare a framework for the implementation of recommendations, as appropriate, and to submit specific proposals for concrete action for consideration by the Council by September 1998". (*Security Council resolution 1170 (1998), para. 4*)

That Working Group, chaired by Gabon, has brought its thinking process to bear on the topics of coordination between the Organization and African regional and subregional organizations in the areas of prevention and peacekeeping; the building of African capacity in peacekeeping; illicit flows of small arms; strengthening arms embargoes; security and neutrality in refugee camps; and the Security Council's ability to monitor the activities it has authorized. It was in this context of broader activity that the Security Council, at its meeting of 24 September 1998, began to take specific measures to follow-up the Secretary-General's recommendations. As Gabon clearly expressed its views on these matters during the Council meetings devoted to the report, I am sure I may today focus solely on the problems involved in promoting durable peace and sustainable development in Africa.

Among the aspects underlined by the Secretary-General in his report, I would particularly stress that the basic principles of democracy must be respected in Africa because, in our opinion, the continent's development demands that all actors of civil society be taken into account. Thus it is vital that the people themselves take charge of their development. In order to do this, they must ensure that their rights are recognized and that democratic rules are observed in the conduct of their country's social, economic and political affairs.

As far as my country is concerned, the head of the Gabonese delegation has already at this fifty-third session eloquently reported on the work we have done and are continuing to do in all those areas.

With respect to sustainable development, we concur with the Secretary-General about the need for economic growth to be accompanied by progress on the social and human levels. High priority must therefore be given to the development of social services in order to meet basic needs and support human capital, particularly in the key areas of education, health and vulnerable groups.

Plainly, if this target is to be met, there must be investment in infrastructures, as well as economic and political reforms in order to create an environment favourable to the emergence of a productive private sector and an efficient public sector. Recent studies by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on direct foreign investment around the world prove that Africa is a profitable region for investors. But we must note that for some years development assistance has steadily declined, with attendant adverse effects on the economies of many African countries.

International assistance therefore needs to be restructured, and the developed countries should be urged to direct that assistance towards the sectors deemed worthy of priority by the African countries and to increase it substantially in order to offset the shortage of direct foreign investment and of national resources. Likewise, donor countries should fulfil the commitments they have freely made and strive to bring their aid and assistance programmes into line with the recipient countries' plans.

It cannot be overemphasized that an increase in financial resources for Africa's development necessarily involves a lasting solution to the painful problem of African debt. Certainly, relief has been agreed to by many donor countries, but increased efforts need to be made.

In this respect, while hailing the initiative of the Bretton Woods institutions in favour of the most indebted and poorest countries, it is regrettable that the number of beneficiary countries of that initiative is still restricted because of the slow pace of the debt-relief process and the conditionalities imposed. Accordingly, I support the Secretary-General's idea that concerted political action at the highest level is required in order to find a satisfactory resolution of the problem of African debt.

Has not the time come to apply the twofold proposal of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which advocates forgiveness of all the debt of the poorest African countries and reconsideration of the situation of so-called upper tier, middle-income countries within a reasonably short period of time and in the context of comprehensive reform of their respective economies?

Those are some factors which combine to exacerbate tension and conflict in our continent.

Concerted action by Member States of the United Nations, the United Nations system as a whole and the international financial institutions, together with other organizations, would help to give a comprehensive, satisfactory response to the multisectoral recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa.

In conclusion, we believe that our efforts would be fruitless if at the end of this exercise the General Assembly failed to adopt, for example, a plan of action and follow-up mechanism which would facilitate and secure implementation of the Secretary-General's recommendations.

Mr. Benítez-Sáenz (Uruguay) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The question before us is one of the priorities of Uruguay's foreign policy: the situation in Africa, the maintenance of lasting peace as a top priority for sustainable development and full enjoyment of the inherent freedoms and rights of the individual, with the full exercise of democratic government. Without peace there cannot be full respect for human rights. Without peace it is not possible to secure sustainable development. Without peace it is not possible to have the full exercise of a democratic system of government in which the three branches of the State — the executive, legislative and judicial — enjoy their rights on an equal footing and independent of one another.

I can be very brief, because we fully agree with all of the excellent report presented by the Secretary-General in document A/52/871 of 13 April 1998. We are glad that the report, originally requested by the Security Council, has also been submitted by the Secretary-General to the Assembly because this contributes not only to recognition of the legitimate powers of this sovereign organ of the Organization, but also to highlighting them.

Because of its own history, nature and particular characteristics, Uruguay regards its presence in Africa as a matter of fraternal equality, with all the solidarity that such feelings involve. Uruguay's sole interest is in cooperation with the fraternal continent in order to secure the stability necessary for its development and well-being. We are convinced that the development and well-being of Africa mean the development and well-being of Latin America and the Caribbean, and that they will contribute to the development and well-being of the rest of the world.

To that end, Uruguay has deployed its personnel in a number of peacekeeping operations. It has contributed in this way in Mozambique, Liberia and Rwanda, and its personnel are still being deployed in Angola and Western Sahara.

These operations have meant the loss of Uruguayan lives; our nation's citizens have shed their blood on African soil. Though this has meant inconsolable grief for our families, it has also certainly, contributed to exalting the honour of our people, civilian or military, as they contribute alongside the fraternal peoples of Africa to the objective of peacekeeping.

But this is not all that binds us to the African continent. Just a few months ago, at a high-level meeting, we were considering the importance of ensuring equal access for all developing countries to international markets. On that same occasion, my delegation stated that securing competitiveness and a more active involvement in international markets is today a prerequisite for growth.

We need only glance at the African continent and at Latin America and the Caribbean to understand how important agriculture is in those countries for achieving sustained economic development. For this reason, Uruguay once again reaffirms that we must work in concert within the framework of the competent

multilateral institutions in order to significantly reduce agricultural tariffs, which now rise as high as 600 per cent.

We must join forces to end export subsidies on agricultural products from developed countries, which work to the detriment of those of us who wish to achieve greater economic growth, well-being, food security and sustainable development. We feel able to compete in a free and well-balanced world market, but we will never be able to compete with the treasuries of the industrialized countries.

Five days ago, in this very Assembly, we commemorated the twentieth anniversary of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among developing Countries. We are convinced that this instrument of international cooperation remains an essential tool for our countries in today's world. In this context, Uruguay, together with a number of South American and African countries, has set up the Afro-Latin American Institute, whose purpose is to promote political bonds between these two subregions in order, in the future, to have closer relations and share mutual experiences in areas such as trade, education, health and agriculture.

It should also be noted that Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil, together with the African countries that have coastlines on the South Atlantic, make up the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic. This represents one more area of political and economic cooperation, as well as a guarantee of peace in the region.

For all these reasons, in conclusion, we feel bound to underscore our full concurrence with the Secretary-General regarding the need to conduct preventive diplomacy in a better, more precise and more global fashion, having particularly in mind post-conflict activities that will permit the construction and consolidation of lasting and durable peace in Africa.

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines): There was wisdom in bringing to the attention of the General Assembly the question of the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. We share the position that, while the matter should continue to enjoy high priority on the agenda of the Security Council, consideration by the General Assembly is required.

Africa is a huge and rich continent. As the report of the Secretary-General correctly indicates, the sources of conflict in Africa are a reflection of the continent's diversity and complexity. Yet it is easy to perceive the elements that have preconditioned these conflicts. Some are, of course, internal in nature; others are legacies of the past, when kingdoms, States and communities were arbitrarily divided by the colonial masters; and still others are consequences of economic want, with the control of precious natural resources or competition for scarce land and water resources igniting border problems.

As noted in the same report, more that 30 wars have been fought in Africa since 1970, the majority of them intra-State in origin.

It may be worth noting that the promised benefits of the process of globalization appear to be elusive for many countries in Africa. At the same time, other African countries have in fact been adversely affected by the negative forces of globalization through depressed prices in export commodities following the financial turmoil that began in East Asia. Invariably, this has accentuated the inherent conditions inhibiting sustainable development in many African countries.

We must all realize that the continuing conflicts in Africa pose a major challenge to all our efforts to ensure global peace, security and prosperity. All efforts vis-à-vis other flash points in the world are incomplete and inconclusive unless the conflicts in Africa are seriously addressed. The international community and the African countries themselves must be able to find ways and means to quickly end the civil strife that is occurring in some parts of the continent, prevent more conflicts and provide a durable foundation for peace, security and development.

We believe that peacemaking efforts need to be well coordinated and well prepared. In this regard, we fully agree with the Secretary-General's statement that

> "Where a peace process is needed, it is the role of the United Nations, with OAU, to help create one." (*A/52/871, para. 18*)

Certainly, the role of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and other regional bodies in Africa such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in the resolution of the conflicts in Africa and its development and prosperity cannot be overemphasized.

My delegation is pleased that the Security Council has taken up the recommendations in the report of the

Secretary-General and that appropriate follow-up actions are being pursued. In this regard, we encourage the Working Group established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1170 (1998) to carry out its important task in the most expeditious manner.

We also believe that efforts aimed at preventing armed conflicts should continue to be directed towards those parts of Africa where the potential for conflict remains high. In this regard, it becomes crucial that the international community accord the fullest support to Security Council resolutions 1196 (1998) and 1197 (1998), aimed at strengthening both the effectiveness of arms embargoes on conflict areas and the peacekeeping capacity of the African countries themselves.

Stopping the proliferation of arms will also have a greater chance of success if accompanied by an initiative engaging the countries concerned in a process of confidence-building and thus giving them a common aspiration for security and development. We therefore support any initiative that the United Nations can implement in this regard. The United Nations should be able to evolve a strategy that brings into focus all interrelated elements, encouraging concerned African countries to put at centre stage the commonality of their interests for a stable and prosperous Africa.

The usual tools of peacemaking must be brought to bear. This may involve the deployment of peacemaking resources as essential ingredients of the strategy. It may refer to diplomatic efforts and the traditional approaches of negotiation, mediation, good offices, fact-finding missions and judicial resolution.

But one important component must be the protection of civilians in situations of conflict. We endorse the proposal in the Secretary-General's report on zones of peace for children, join the call for stopping the use of children as combatants and reiterate our appeal to all parties in conflicts to respect existing universal humanitarian principles.

Apart from the security issue, the required action must also address humanitarian needs and assistance for the recovery and reconstruction of affected African countries. Providing assistance to the victims of conflict is a moral imperative and must be pursued as a complement to action directed at the resolution of the conflict itself. It is not a substitute for political action aimed at conflict resolution. It is a necessary provision, as a step towards full recovery, rehabilitation and development. It is therefore critical that humanitarian assistance be properly coordinated with the affected countries themselves.

Another critical component of the strategy is the strengthening of the economic foundations for sustainable development of the African countries. Many of them continue to rely substantially on official development assistance for development financing. It is important that there should be no disruption or reduction in the provision of such sources of finance. We note the comment in paragraph 90 of the same report of the Secretary-General that

> "Dramatic cuts in assistance to Africa have been registered in recent years. This trend has hurt rather than helped Africa's efforts to implement the difficult economic and political reforms which are now under way across the continent."

On a related issue, the United Nations system should be able to sustain a level of development cooperation that is adequately funded and supported by the donor community. We need to reinvigorate all the initiatives that favour the countries in Africa, such as United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s.

The international community must also find a solution to Africa's unsustainable external debt burden. In paragraph 95 of his report, the Secretary-General notes that

> "Significant movement on lifting Africa's crippling debt burden will require concerted political action at the highest levels."

My delegation fully endorses the call of the Secretary-General for definitive action by the international community on the question of Africa's external debt.

My delegation also joins the call for special efforts that must be extended by the developed countries to ensure access for competitive African goods and commodities. We agree with the proposal that the question of eliminating trade barriers to African products should be high on the agenda of the major industrialized countries and that in this regard an appropriate common policy should be adopted either bilaterally between the concerned African countries and the developed countries or within the World Trade Organization.

I wish to conclude by expressing the hope that the statements we have all made before this Assembly may be translated into specific contributions to resolve the perennial conflict in the African continent and bring about peace, security and prosperity in that region.

Let me also reaffirm the full support of the Philippines for the Secretary-General's call for concrete action to create a new momentum for peace and development in Africa.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) (*interpretation from French*): The General Assembly's consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Africa gives us a further opportunity to consider the important questions raised in the report. It also allows us to reflect more profoundly on ways and means of helping Africa meet the challenges that it is facing. The widening of the debate on this question in the General Assembly will facilitate an understanding of the problems of the continent and, we hope, will further sensitize the international community to the need to work for the development of our countries.

The inclusion of this item on the agenda of the General Assembly also reinforces the action of the Security Council, which last April showed great interest in the maintenance of peace in Africa and in contributing to the development and growth of the continent.

Our meeting today will also contribute to a better understanding of this huge and multifaceted continent. It will help balance the view that some have of Africa by recalling that that ancient continent in which young States are developing is also a land of hope and of the future that aspires to contribute to global civilization and to make its mark on the coming century. The security problems that affect certain regions of Africa continue, of course, to be a source of concern. The consequences of these problems are often tragic and create intolerable situations whose first victims are civilians. The cost and the damage caused by these scourges consume enormous amounts of human and financial resources that could be used for the development of the continent.

Even if fratricidal wars are reaching alarming proportions in some regions, we should not forget that political stability, which is linked to the breakdown of the social fabric, especially along ethnic lines, is not a problem peculiar to Africa.

My country believes that the United Nations has a fundamental role to play in finding solutions to intra-State conflicts. This means that all the structures and institutions of the United Nations should coordinate their activities effectively and should be in a position to respond appropriately to the needs that arise.

We applaud the efforts of the Secretary-General in that respect. It goes without saying that the contribution of Member States is vital to ensure that this work is successful. However, cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity is crucial in this area. Experience has shown that the establishment of structures for conflict prevention, management and resolution by that pan-African organization requires major resources, given the activities that must be carried out. In this connection, the delegation of Tunisia welcomes the measures recently recommended by the Security Council. We believe that prevention should be at the centre of efforts to preserve peace and security in Africa.

With regard to peacekeeping, we believe that the modalities for cooperation advocated by the Security Council to strengthen the capacity of Africa in that respect deserve to be developed in practice. The idea of a partnership between troop-contributing countries and those that can provide equipment is a useful way to increase the participation of African States in peacekeeping operations. It is important to stress here the vital role of the United Nations in launching these operations and defining their mandate, as well as in financing them, in keeping with the primary responsibility of the Security Council in this area.

The various initiatives to strengthen the peacekeeping capacity of Africa should therefore be viewed positively. We should like to stress that the continuation and development of these initiatives require us to take account of the parameters established by the African States as well as the objectives outlined by the OAU.

My country's delegation also believes the effort for conflict prevention should not be confined to security matters but must also encompass socio-economic issues. Tensions and crises often lead to the outbreak of conflicts that originate in the persistence of poverty, marginalization and deteriorating living conditions.

Quite clearly, without development we can hardly hope to reduce conflicts whose origin often lies in poverty, marginalization and discrimination. Economic growth alone certainly cannot guarantee stability or social

peace, but without it there can be no lasting improvement in the economic and social situation in our countries.

In order to achieve this, and despite the difficult international environment, African countries have adopted strong economic measures through stabilization programmes and structural adjustment programmes. These programmes have all had a multidimensional aspect encompassing, *inter alia*, economic and commercial liberalization measures, improving financial management and modernizing taxation systems.

Nevertheless, we would stress that many African countries that have established Draconian structural adjustment programmes have often had to slash their social expenditures and therefore reduce basic social services. The necessary economic restructuring has led to the recovery that we are now seeing in Africa after 20 or so years of recession. However, this improvement will remain fragile unless backed up by the international community through sufficient infusions of secure resources and a favourable external context.

Accordingly, the countries of the South can give considerable assistance to Africa through technology transfers, training, joint ventures and investment. The solidarity of the countries of the South was made clear at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development and the Asia-Africa Forum on experience sharing.

Work done now by the industrialized countries and the United Nations system should, we think, be much more vigorous in terms of official development assistance, investment, access to markets and dealing with the problem of indebtedness.

Turning specifically to the problem of indebtedness, it is widely acknowledged that it has serious consequences for investment and new growth. Not only does it make it impossible for public investment in physical infrastructure and human resources, but it discourages private investment, including foreign investment. Need I recall here that the external debt of African countries, expressed as a percentage of exports and gross domestic product, is the highest of all developing regions?

In this context, Tunisia appreciates the initiatives taken by some countries to cancel the debts of African countries. Because of the complex situation existing in our continent, we believe that urgent measures for Africa should be taken to alleviate the external debt, as well as to promote economic diversification and to mobilize additional financial resources both by means of official development assistance and by encouraging the private sector to invest in Africa.

My delegation welcomes this debate on the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Africa. The high level of the discussion is a good sign that our work will conclude positively.

Mr. Menkerios (Eritrea): In speaking on this agenda item, it is quite fitting to start by commending the Secretary-General for his insightful report on the root causes of conflict and the measures necessary to ensure durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. Although the causes and remedies of Africa's political and economic problems are well presented in the report, it is important to highlight and expound upon some of the key elements of these problems and solutions.

The causes of Africa's problems, both political and economic, have external and internal roots, and a proper understanding of these is necessary when looking for solutions. The colonial experience left a legacy of ills for the continent. The depletion and decimation of material and human resources undermined, if not destroyed, social institutions; not so well-fitted — indeed, implanted — politico-economic systems; and a host of other injustices contributed to a handicapped start for African countries at the time of independence. Overcoming this legacy has proved very difficult for African peoples and Governments, especially when the attempt was complicated by the unequal relationship which, of necessity, ensued with the economically developed countries, leading to Africa's marginalization in all spheres of international development. This, I believe, needs to be well understood and accepted, and conscious efforts made, both internally and externally, to compensate for or correct it through time.

We would, however, be looking for excuses for our failures — incorrect and irresponsible — if we Africans were to believe and say that all our problems were caused by factors beyond our doing and control, and if we expected their solutions to come from outside as well. It has been more than 30 years since decolonization in most of Africa, and corrupt, dictatorial and inept regimes in many African countries are responsible for preventing African peoples from making any headway in any aspect of society during this period. This has also affected the international attitude and response to Africa. Any change in the hitherto existing international attitude and response

of neglect to Africa can come only as a result of positive changes inside Africa itself.

Such positive changes have of course begun to arrive in many parts of Africa, especially during the last decade. Responsible regimes have appeared, committed to building democratic institutions, adopting development strategies based on their peoples' needs and their human and material resource capability, enhancing especially their human resource capacity and, most importantly, working for regional cooperation and integration. This process of change, I believe, is well set. Despite the enormous problems that are being encountered along the way, it can and will only continue forward for it represents the positive aspirations of a growing number of Africa's peoples that are no longer prepared to accept being excluded from the determination of their own destiny.

Parallel with the eruption of conflicts — mostly with root causes associated with past ills and economic deprivation — and the appearance of famines and other human disasters in many areas, Africa's continental and regional capacity to work in a concerted manner for peace, stability and economic development has increased. The sustained higher rate of economic development achieved in many countries, which can be taken as the best indicator of improvement in all the other aspects of social life, also attests to the continuity of the process of positive change in Africa.

But although this process may be expected to continue, the speed with which it can continue depends on many crucial factors. It all starts with changes made within each country in the direction of establishing and strengthening democratic institutions, adopting and implementing appropriate, self-reliant development strategies, eliminating corruption, ensuring the democratic participation of the population in all aspects of their nation's life, *et cetera*. Fostering regional cooperation both in establishing peace and stability and in working for economic development is of great importance. Partnership from the international community in these endeavours — support to enhance capacity, increased investment, the opening up of international markets for mutual benefit, and opening up other doors for Africa's integration into the world economy — is also essential.

Much more could be said on these points, but I believe this has been adequately done in the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General. What remains to be achieved is a genuine and concerted effort to implement the recommendations that have been made. Eritrea fully endorses the basic recommendations made in the report of the Secretary-General, and pledges to do its part to ensure that Africa's regeneration becomes a reality.

Conflicts exist today in several parts of Africa, and much has been said about these conflict and their resolution during the general debate at the present session, as well as in other forums. One of these conflicts is the border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which remains unresolved because of the refusal of the Ethiopian Government to talk about a peaceful solution unless and until Eritrea unilaterally and unconditionally withdraws from territories that Ethiopia claims but that are within Eritrea's established borders.

One does not erase the fact that one is an aggressor by simply accusing the victim of being the aggressor. That, unfortunately, is what Ethiopian representatives here have tried to do during this entire session. Eritrea has made it abundantly clear that the sad and unnecessary conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia started as a result of Ethiopia's violation of Eritrean sovereignty and Ethiopia's occupation of Eritrean territories that are clearly within Eritrea's borders as established during the colonial period. Eritrea has not only invited independent verification of this fact from the outset, but has also presented concrete proposals for the peaceful and legal solution of the issue. Eritrea remains ready for dialogue with the Ethiopian Government on an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, demilitarization of all disputed areas throughout the area of the border between the two countries, and the demarcation of the common border on the basis of recognition of the inviolability of boundaries established during the colonial period.

It is disappointing that the Ethiopian Government rejects any proposal for a peaceful solution short of Eritrea's unconditional acceptance of its ultimatum on unilateral withdrawal from disputed territories. It threatens to use force unless its ultimatum is bowed to.

I would like to pledge the continuing firm commitment of the State of Eritrea to seeking a peaceful and legal solution and to condemning the use of force. I would like to invite the representative of Ethiopia to make a similar commitment before the General Assembly. Clearly, it is the rejection of these principles and adherence to the threat or use of force that constitutes aggression. Clearly too, succumbing to this threat or use of force would constitute appeasement.

There has been adequate independent testimony to Ethiopia's violation of the human rights of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin, and of the humane treatment of Ethiopians in Eritrea. Throwing the mud that you find on your own face, which is what we have heard the Ethiopian representative doing here, cannot reverse the facts.

I would like to reiterate that Eritrea is prepared to do its share to ensure peace and stability with its neighbour, Ethiopia, with the rest of the Horn of Africa region, and with all of Africa, and to work for the implementation of the essential proposals made in the report of the Secretary-General.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 45/6 of 16 October 1990, I now call on the observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Ms. Junod (International Committee of the Red Cross) (*interpretation from French*): As members know, the mission of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is to prevent and relieve the suffering caused by war. Sadly, Africa is the main arena for its activities today. The ICRC has 19 operational and regional delegations and some 3,000 staff on that continent, and its work in Africa accounts for almost half of its operational budget. We therefore feel closely involved with the Secretary-General's report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, which reflects a number of our own concerns. We had the privilege of taking the floor before the Security Council during the open debate that took place last spring, and now we think it important to make a brief contribution in this plenary meeting of the General Assembly, which represents the entire community of States.

We must deplore the human suffering caused by the eruption of new conflicts since the publication of the report — in Guinea-Bissau, between Ethiopia and Eritrea, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, most recently, in Lesotho — adding to the already heavy toll.

Working for conflict victims is the *raison d'être* of the ICRC. Today more than ever, this work would be inconceivable without the ongoing dialogue the ICRC maintains not only with the United Nations but also with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which has also granted it observer status. This close cooperation, especially in the framework of the OAU Commission of Twenty on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Africa, is indispensable for gaining a better understanding of the contexts in which we have to operate. That understanding is further enhanced by a valuable network of contacts, which are required to increase our effectiveness.

We shall confine our remarks today to two main areas: reaffirmation of the relevance of international humanitarian law, and the need for genuinely humanitarian action to assist victims of conflict, action that prepares the ground for reconstruction and creates the conditions necessary for sustainable development.

Like the Secretary-General, we have noted the sharp decline in the level of adherence to humanitarian norms in crisis situations. In view of the abuses and atrocities committed against civilian victims of conflict, particularly women and children, and against refugees, displaced persons, detainees and prisoners, it is absolutely essential to restore respect for universal humanitarian principles by all those who bear weapons. Furthermore, it should be remembered that the non-governmental actors appearing on the scene in increasing numbers are also duty-bound to observe minimum humanitarian standards.

The ICRC can therefore only endorse such a clear diagnosis and such a pressing appeal in these times marked by the proliferation of conflicts in countries where State structures have collapsed and by the emergence of struggles aimed at asserting identity of one kind or another in which the annihilation of a group of people regarded as rivals is the principal objective. A new difficulty has been added to this, one associated with what we refer to as the privatization of war and the emergence of forces which depend on private groups or individuals over whom State authorities have little or no influence.

Africa is rich in traditions imbued with profound human values which it shares with humanitarian law and which can be found in the codes that have traditionally governed the conduct of hostilities. The challenge before us all is therefore to revive those values, especially among the young — the vital force which makes up three quarters of the continent's population. This mobilization is a long-term preventive effort to make everyone aware of the fact that, whatever the situation, there are limits to violence and that neither those who order acts of violence, nor those who carry them out, nor those who tolerate them can say "I did not know". All the Member States of the United Nations have undertaken not only to respect, but also to ensure respect for, the humanitarian

law treaties. This is therefore a universal collective obligation with regard to all conflict victims. It is everyone's business.

In this regard, the African countries have embarked on a process of legislative reform with the technical assistance of the ICRC's Advisory Service in order to incorporate into their national legislation the measures necessary to implement humanitarian law, and in particular to prosecute the perpetrators of violations.

It is unfortunately a well-known fact that war criminals usually manage to avoid being brought to justice. The creation by the Security Council of the ad hoc Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda was a first step in criminal prosecutions. The adoption in Rome of the Statute of the International Criminal Court is now another reason to hope, especially because it covers violations committed during internal armed conflicts and includes war crimes such as the recruitment of children under the age of 15 into armed conflicts, rape and sexual slavery.

There are other factors that give us every reason to expect that the number of victims will decline in the future. Of the 47 parties to the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel mines, 13 are African States. In fact, we learned this morning that a new State, Guinea, has been added to that list. We have no doubt that many others will follow their lead in the near future. Subsequently, all will have to join forces to take practical measures to eliminate landmines.

In his report, the Secretary-General raises the issue of the proliferation of light weapons, which without a doubt account for innumerable violations of humanitarian law. The proposal put forward by Mali for a moratorium on the manufacture, export and import of light weapons in West Africa is a pioneering initiative in this respect.

The Secretary-General has stressed the need for the international community to use all the mechanisms at its disposal in a consistent and coordinated manner to find comprehensive solutions to conflicts. Such solutions must take into account political, social and economic factors without which lasting results cannot be achieved. Indeed, the ICRC notes with increasing concern the tendency shown by certain States in recent years to resort to humanitarian action instead of taking political or even military action when it is appropriate within the framework of relevant international instruments. Central Africa is a good example of this.

However, nothing can replace the political will to resolve the underlying causes of conflict and the tragedies they cause by using the whole range of legitimate means available, including restoring law and order. Humanitarian assistance cannot be a substitute. Supplying aid to the victims of conflict is the business of organizations whose aims and working methods are genuinely humanitarian. The issue of the safety of the resident, refugee and displaced populations of the Great Lakes region provides us with a prime illustration of this and we are seeing the tragic consequences today.

Acknowledging the need for a strategic approach, political, military and humanitarian players therefore have to harmonize their activities. They must seek synergies between their activities with due regard for their interdependence, but also for their respective mandates and specific roles. However, this approach must not subject all humanitarian action to political objectives at the expense of the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

The best interests of victims remain at the core of the concerns and operations of the ICRC. For example, as the Secretary-General points out, the imposition of sanctions by the international community can affect unforeseen victims. Furthermore, we have always spoken in favour of exemptions on humanitarian grounds. We are pleased to note in this connection that more sensitive indicators for assessing and even anticipating the impact of sanctions on the population are being developed.

All of this is not to say that humanitarian action has no political dimension or that it never has any impact on the course of a conflict. It is true that the presence of humanitarian organizations has sometimes had adverse effects by unintentionally serving the purposes of war. In this regard the ICRC shares the Secretary-General's concern about emergency situations which attract a multitude of aid agencies with divergent objectives and working methods. In such circumstances it is essential that these agencies harmonize their action and avoid duplication of efforts. Moreover, this is vital for the safety of all concerned.

The report highlights the need to integrate and establish links between the concepts and the actions involved in assistance, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development. The ICRC fully endorses this opinion. In its aid operations it has opted where possible for an approach whose ultimate purpose is to help the individuals and communities concerned to regain their

autonomy and to free themselves of dependence on outside assistance by involving them as closely as possible in the planning and implementation of programmes.

Numerous efforts are being undertaken in this regard in various parts of Africa to restore the means of production to population groups which have suffered the effects of war in such areas as agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries and handicrafts. Similarly, the ICRC is running programmes to restore basic health services, to fit those disabled by war with prosthetic devices and to repair water-supply networks and sewage and waste disposal systems.

In conducting its operations the ICRC mobilizes all available local partners. For both the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the network of African national organizations provides invaluable support. Their volunteers often work in extremely difficult conditions. Many have lost their lives in the course of their duties on the African continent.

Providing aid without taking steps to provide protection would be absurd and could even be counter-productive. Any operation carried out on behalf of victims of conflicts must not only bring them the material assistance they need but also protect them from the dangers that prolong and exacerbate their suffering, while at the same time preserving their human dignity.

The aim of the ICRC's protection activities is essentially to ensure respect for the lives and physical integrity of individuals. This endeavour is inseparable from the work of defending human rights, whose ultimate purpose is the smooth functioning of civil society and the exercise of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this agenda item.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Yimer (Ethiopia): Since last Friday the Assembly has been discussing the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa.

This is a very important topic, and the reason for the inscription of this item on the agenda is that there are conflicts in Africa. That is the reality. We are not discussing this issue in the abstract, because there are concrete conflict situations in Africa, and we cannot gloss over them in discussing this agenda item.

One of the conflict situations in Africa today is the one between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The report of the Secretary-General was issued on 13 April 1998; almost exactly a month later, Ethiopia was subjected to an unprovoked act of aggression by Eritrea. That is the reality.

This afternoon the representative of Eritrea presented the usual rehash of the Eritrean attempts to hoodwink international opinion on the character of the conflict. This does not come as a surprise to us. Towards the end of his statement he said that there was a border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. But the reason for the conflict today between Ethiopia and Eritrea is not the border dispute. It is aggression committed by a State Member of the United Nations against another to solve a border dispute — the use of force to resolve a border dispute, in violation of Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Charter of the United Nations. So Ethiopia is the victim of aggression.

The aggressor historically presents itself as the victim; this is a familiar ploy, which we have heard again this afternoon. Again, that does not come as a surprise to us. We are not alone in saying that force was used to settle a border dispute. Since 12 May 1998, a day that will live in infamy, as we said earlier, there have been attempts to resolve this problem, although Ethiopia has never responded in kind.

There have been attempts by third parties, beginning with the United States and Rwanda and up to the Committee of Ambassadors of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), who submitted their report recently on the conflict. None of these third parties has ever indicated that Ethiopia had committed an act of aggression against Eritrea. On the contrary, they have said in clear terms who was where before 12 May 1998. This is clear to everyone, including the Eritrean aggressor.

Now if in addressing this body today we are saying something we have said before and which is familiar, it is because Eritrea has used this ploy — saying that there is a border conflict — repeatedly. We have always said that the border conflict can be resolved only by peaceful means, not by the use of force. If someone uses force to resolve a border dispute, then the victim has every right, under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations and in exercise of the right of self-defence, to reverse the aggression. I must put that in terms that are as clear as possible, and not for the first time. We are not addressing this to Eritrea, because there is no point. We are addressing this to the international community.

The other familiar ploy is that Eritrea has submitted concrete proposals. But those concrete proposals happen to be at variance with the proposals submitted by third parties in the past. The familiar proposals are cessation of hostilities, a ceasefire, demilitarization and a plethora of other proposals to appear peace-loving.

We are not going to reward this aggression. We are not going to appease the aggressor. We have never done that at any point in our history. We are not going to follow this path, because it is not a path to peace; it is a path to appeasement. Ethiopia has never refused dialogue with Eritrea. We have said that we will engage in dialogue only when the aggression is reversed; then we will resolve it peacefully, by any means, in any forum. There is no shortage of forums to settle border disputes, because border disputes are numerous throughout the world.

There is no point in rehashing the same stories to appear peace-loving, as I said earlier. The best thing to do would be to accept what the third parties politely said: that there should be a return to the status quo ante of 12 May 1998, and at that point there is a procedure proposed by those third parties to be set in motion once the status quo ante has been restored.

Those proposals were supported by the Organization of African Unity. They were supported strongly by the Security Council. Then the OAU, within the framework of these proposals, started its own process. And the last proposal in the most recent report of the OAU Committee of Ambassadors was — we have it here in black and white; we have the document for everyone to see — that before 12 May 1998 Eritrean troops were within Eritrea, and after 12 May 1988 they were within Ethiopian territory, because those territories were administered by Ethiopia before that day. And what happened between 6 and 12 May constitutes "the fundamental element of the crisis". That is what they said.

Does that indicate that Ethiopia was the aggressor? On the contrary. Maybe they never used the word "aggressor", because in the international community we do not call a spade a spade. But we will call a spade a spade, here and everywhere, however much the Eritrean regime tries to present itself as a victim, because all aggressors throughout history have presented themselves as victims. We propose, therefore, that the aggression should be reversed, and then we will sit down and negotiate a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

That is the bottom line. It is futile to try to hoodwink others or to engage in duplicity to change the reality that the Eritrean aggression continues. It continues even as I speak. But we have been bending over backwards for the last several months, and we will continue to do so with a view to a peaceful resolution. But we will never succumb to aggression.

Mr. Menkerios (Eritrea): I would hate to turn this Assembly, which is discussing the question of conflict and economic problems in Africa and how to resolve them, into a forum more like a court, where declarations are made to an audience that does not have direct access to the truth.

I would like to take the Ethiopian representative at his word. I agree with him that, actually, it is normal for the aggressor to appear as a victim.

Instead of repeating these statements here to each other and to this Assembly, we challenge the Ethiopian Government and the Ethiopian representative to make it explicit here that we should have an independent investigation of who is actually the aggressor and who is not — who is in whose land and who is not. We still stand by that invitation.

Regarding the question of a peaceful solution, here again we have heard the Ethiopian representative continue to misrepresent the fact that there have been attempts in the past at facilitation in which political recommendations were made — not recommendations based on the investigation of facts. It is true that we demanded an investigation of the facts on the ground, and then that there be concrete proposals. And this is exactly what the Organization of African Unity (OAU) heads of State are doing right now.

If there were a finalized recommendation that the OAU had accepted and did not see any reason to pursue, then there would have been no reason for the team of esteemed heads of State in Africa to send ambassadors to investigate the facts on the ground and then to examine these facts and come up with proposals for a solution. These heads of State have just invited both leaders — the leaders of the two countries — to come to Ouagadougou within the next few days, or perhaps a week or two, to a meeting to listen, to present their findings, to present their proposals. We have accepted and cooperated with this process.

It is unreasonable, irrational even, to continue to insist that there have been recommendations that everybody has accepted and everybody has finalized, and that it is only Eritrea that has not complied with them. This has been repeated many, many times.

Eritrea again reiterates that it is ready to cooperate with the peace efforts of Africa, of the OAU — peace efforts in support of this attempt, this effort by Africa. And this process is continuing. We hope that the Ethiopian Government will do the same as well.

Mr. Yimer (Ethiopia): There is a saying, "Something is better than nothing". In the statement in exercise of right of reply by the representative of Eritrea, at least we have heard something. He referred to facilitation. He referred to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) process. He referred to the eminent heads of State of the OAU. He referred to the committee of ambassadors who, as I have said, have presented proposals. All this was glossed over when they were mentioned in his main statement. That is why I said this is an improvement in Eritrea's behaviour, at least as far as we know it up to today.

The representative of Eritrea said that this body does not have access to the truth. The truth is contained in documents. The documents are available. We can make them available to everybody so that they can make their own judgments. It is not abstract. It is not difficult to find. So it is an utter distortion to say that this body has no access to the truth. The international community can have access to the truth. It has access to the truth.

He also talked about an independent investigation. The independent investigation has been done by the committee of ambassadors, which has submitted a report. Those ambassadors have submitted a report to their Foreign Ministers; their Foreign Ministers have presented it to the two Governments; and of course the heads of State are preparing to present their recommendations. So I hope we are not talking about the independent investigation that the Eritrean Government is trying to establish, because they have been laying down conditions. One condition — they have said, "We have concrete proposals of our own", to go along with all this cessation of hostilities, ceasefire, demilitarization. Then we have this proposal, this idea now that there should be an independent investigation. At the same time, and in the same breath, they are saying and we are hearing — at least, as I said, it is something — that there is a process going on, but it is not yet consummated. That is a fact. It is not yet consummated. But every step of the way there have been conclusions. There have been conclusions, and that is a reality. Whether Eritrea likes it or not, these conclusions are stated in black and white, and they have rejected them. We have accepted them. So the improvement is there now, but the situation will not change, because when it comes to taking concrete actions we don't see anything coming from the Eritrean Government.

I am going to repeat myself this afternoon. We are saying we are prepared to go all the way to solve this problem peacefully. But solving this problem peacefully does not mean accepting aggression, allowing the aggressor to enjoy the fruits of aggression. That is what I want to stress again and again. Nobody should be under any illusion here. And the Eritrean Government is not under any illusion that we are going to accept the consequences of the 12 May 1998 aggression. The process is there. That process will have to result in the reversal of the aggression. Then we will sit down and negotiate however long it might take to settle the border dispute, the existence of which we have never denied.

Mr. Menkerios (Eritrea): I simply want to remind this Assembly that I have just heard the threat of the use of force. This threat has continually been made by the leaders of Ethiopia: that Eritrea must unilaterally withdraw from lands that are in dispute, lands that are quite clearly within Eritrean boundaries but the Ethiopian Government claims them as theirs; and unless we do so unconditionally, unilaterally, they will use force to make us do so. That is exactly what we heard from the Ethiopian representative right now.

That is the crux of the matter from the beginning, from the outset — that you use force, and then the other side defends itself, and simply because you cry out "aggression", you expect everybody to accept that as aggression. It is the use of force and the threat of the use

of force that we have just heard again that has become the crux of the problem. Eritrea has rejected the use of force, reiterates again that it rejects the use of force, is prepared for a peaceful and legal solution to this problem and is cooperating with the attempts of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to come up with a report.

I again challenge the representative of Ethiopia, who said that there are reports, and that these reports are available to this body, that finalized reports have come from the OAU peace process. We are still in the process. We are still waiting for the heads of State to come out not only with a full report on their investigations but also with their proposals for a peaceful solution. As we have said, we have cooperated in the past, and we will continue to cooperate in the future in search of a peaceful solution.

But there are threats every day, guns actually pointed at our head, being told every day that Ethiopia has finalized its preparations for war, that Ethiopia actually is going to evict us, the Eritreans, out of our own land — lands that clearly are within Eritrea. We have been saying that we are ready to demilitarize all disputed areas in the interest of a peaceful solution: demilitarization by both sides of the entire border, all disputed areas, and we are ready to have an international monitoring body in this area until we peacefully demarcate the border.

All this is very clear to the Ethiopian Government. Despite this, Ethiopia has made conditions and says that unless its conditions are unconditionally, unilaterally met by Eritrea, that unless Eritrea withdraws, they will make it do so by force. And he repeated it again.

We are prepared to defend our right as well. It is our duty and right to defend our own territory, as we are doing. And we will continue to do this despite the threats of the Ethiopian Government. But it is these threats, this use of force, this reliance on the use of force that really has been the crux of the problem from the outset up until now. This is being repeated every day by Ethiopia's leaders.

What kind of a peaceful atmosphere is this? What kind of a conducive atmosphere to a peaceful solution of the issue can this provide? Under intimidation? Under threats that are repeated daily by Ethiopia's leaders?

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in exercise of the right of reply.

I should like to inform members that a draft resolution on this item will be submitted to the Secretariat at a later date.

Agenda item 113

Programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/53/485)

The Acting President: If there is no proposal under rule 66 of the rules of procedure, I shall take it that the General Assembly decides not to discuss the report of the Fifth Committee that is before the Assembly today.

It was so decided.

The Acting President: Statements will therefore be limited to explanations of vote or position.

The positions of delegations regarding the recommendation of the Fifth Committee have been made clear in the Committee and are reflected in the relevant official records.

May I remind Members that under paragraph 7 of decision 34/401, the General Assembly agreed that

> "When the same draft resolution is considered in a Main Committee and in plenary meeting, a delegation should, as far as possible, explain its vote only once, i.e., either in the Committee or in plenary meeting unless that delegation's vote in plenary meeting is different from its vote in the Committee."

May I also remind delegations that, also in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes.

Before we begin to take action on the recommendation contained in the report of the Fifth Committee, I should like to advise representatives that we are going to proceed to take a decision in the same manner as was done in the Fifth Committee.

The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 6 of its report.

The draft resolution is entitled "Analysis of savings resulting from the improved overall cost-effectiveness achieved pursuant to the ninth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, including the restructuring of the intergovernmental machinery and the reform of the Secretariat, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/220 of 22 December 1997 and proposals pursuant to General Assembly decision 52/462 of 31 March 1998". The Fifth Committee adopted the draft resolution without a vote.

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 53/3).

The Acting President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 113.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.